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**MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN THE DRUG WAR -
JUST SAY NO!**

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MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN THE DRUG WAR --
JUST SAY NO!

The "War on Drugs" has, for three decades, been the term used to refer to the efforts to rid the United States of the scourge of illegal narcotics use and all the attendant problems which flow from this horrifying social problem. But who should fight this war? Past Presidents have engaged the military to halt the flow of illegal drugs into the United States, the rationale being that if you can limit the supply of drugs, use will drop significantly.

But is the military the right instrument to use in this "war"? This paper posits that it is not. The paper will detail the background of military and DoD involvement in narcotics interdiction, address the impact that interdiction efforts have had on illegal drug use in the United States, present reasons why the military should not be involved in the interdiction effort, and suggest possible alternative means to combat the drug problem in the United States.

BACKGROUND:

Although illegal drug use has been an issue in the United States since shortly before the Civil War, this use was confined to a relatively small percentage of the population, and public concern was limited. With the advent of the counterculture of the 1960's, the use of illegal drugs spread throughout the general population. Concern about the availability of drugs then became a White House issue. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy held the first White House Conference on Narcotics and Drug Abuse. The Nixon Administration actually launched the "War on Drugs" setting up the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse

Prevention in 1971 and later, in 1973 establishing the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). "The 1980's also saw the first appearance of crack in the nation's inner cities. . . In response to the spread of drug use Reagan increased funding for the drug war from \$1.5 billion when he came to office in 1981 to \$2.75 billion in 1985 "¹ President Bush escalated the fight against illegal drug use and in his September 5, 1989, televised address Bush called drugs "the gravest threat facing our nation today." Funding for the war on drugs "increased by nearly 80 percent during the Bush administration. By fiscal 1992, federal funding stood at \$11.9 billion. . . according to at least one expert, the war on drugs was a political reaction to public frustration over the spread of crack cocaine "²

The 1986 National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 221, signed by President Reagan referred to international narcotics trafficking as a "threat to United States national security." As a result he expanded the number of national drug enforcers to include the Departments of Defense, Treasury, Transportation, Justice and State, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency The NSDD directed "the military to actively support, for the first time, a range of international counternarcotics activities such as the planning and execution of large anti-drug operations, intelligence collection, combined exercises, the training of foreign military forces, and technical and material support to foreign governments."³

In 1989, the National Defense Authorization Act became public law. This law assigned the Department of Defense the mission of assisting in reducing the flow of illegal drugs into the United States, specifically to serve as the single lead agency responsible for

¹ Mary H Cooper, "War on Drugs," The CQ Researcher 19 March 1993 250

² Cooper 251

³ Kate Doyle, "The Militarization of the Drug War in Mexico," Current History February, 1993 84

the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the US.

The Secretary of Defense, in his 15 September 1989 Guidance for Implementation of the President's National Drug Control Strategy stated that detection and countering of the production, trafficking, and use of illegal drugs were now high-priority national security missions. DoD organizations were directed to support the Law Enforcement Agencies and host nations in their attack on the drug flow at the source, in transit, and within the United States. The Commanders in Chief (CINCs) of the Unified and Specified (U&S) commands were directed to elevate the priority of the counterdrug mission.

The Clinton White House announced a 1994 National Drug Control Strategy that stipulates that various agencies should cooperate to attack drug proliferation in various ways, simultaneously. In response, the Defense Department has refocused its policy. Its mission elements now include:

- * Increased support to nations demonstrating the political will to combat narcotrafficking.
- * Bringing military intelligence capabilities to antidrug efforts, including those of the Drug Enforcement Agency, against the cartels.
- * Detecting and monitoring illegal drug transport
- * Supporting domestic law-enforcement agencies, particularly in high intensity drug trafficking areas
- * Continuing military drug testing and education programs.⁴

The military assets being used to conduct anti-drug operations in accordance with this National Drug Control Strategy include: intelligence resources, US Air Force and Navy

⁴ "Military's Counterdrug Policy Restructured" JAMA, June 1, 1994 1639

early warning aircraft, Air Force or Air National Guard interceptor aircraft and naval vessels.

IMPACT OF INTERDICTION:

"Despite \$100 billion spent since 1981, drugs are just as easy to get from an unending supply of dealers. . . and they are often cheaper than they were a decade ago."⁵ In a war such as the drug war, the ultimate measure of success is the amount of drugs available on the streets in the United States and the price of these drugs. Statement after statement on the current drug use situation reflects the failure of interdiction and other supply-oriented programs to stop the flow of illegal drugs into this country. "If the availability of illegal drugs is the principal measure of success, the effectiveness of the war on drugs is less clear. With the exception of marijuana, where rising prices suggest a tightening of supplies, drugs are just as easy to obtain in most cities today as they were a decade ago."⁶ Heroin prices are falling and supplies are plentiful. "Interdiction has had little impact on the supply of cocaine. The suppliers maintain large stocks, all down the chain of distribution, ready to be drawn upon if supply is disrupted. Indeed, occasional shortages may help to maintain retail prices and, according to GAO, smuggler's profits are so high that they can easily absorb occasional losses."⁷

Interdiction efforts have, in fact, forced the cartels to become more innovative in shipping their products. And this innovation has caused more problems, rather than less for law enforcement officials. Cartels are now moving their goods through the commercial

⁵ "Fighting the Right Drug War," editorial, U.S. News and World Report 26 April, 1993 74

⁶ Cooper 245

⁷ "High in the Andes," The Economist 13 February, 1993 46

cargo system, often times using containerized cargo shipments to hide the drugs. The difficulty of interdicting these types of shipments is enormous. "In 1991, for example, 1.8 million containers arrived in the Port of Newark alone, but US customs inspectors there were able to search thoroughly only 15-18 containers a day."⁸ Additionally, drug cartels are constantly diversifying their products, often introducing new, more potent, illegal substances into the US market. Perhaps the most telling statement on the value of interdiction efforts comes from Army General Barry McCaffrey, Commander, Southern Command, which spends \$153 million a year on activities to halt the supply of drugs into the US. "The United States is spending \$13 billion a year to stop the importation and sale of illegal drugs, but the expenditure and effort yields little."⁹ Generally, the consensus appears to be that interdiction efforts have had limited success. Faint praise for an expensive national program using resources increasingly in demand for other national security and domestic issues.

SHOULD THE MILITARY FIGHT THIS WAR?:

Since the end of the Cold War, military and civilian thinkers alike have been attempting to define the role of the military in this changing world. There is no easy formula available to decide where and when to use US forces, but leading policy makers have agreed on guidelines. The National Security Strategy of the United States published in February, 1995, reflect these guidelines. This strategy of Engagement and Enlargement

⁸ Stephen Flynn, "Worldwide Drug Scourge, The Expanding Trade in Illicit Drugs," The Brookings Review, Winter, 1993. 9

⁹ William Matthews, "A Busy '94 for the US Say the CINCS/ Here's What They Expect This Year," The Navy Times, 27 February 1995

recognizes that there will be many demands on the US military; but resource constraints mandate that we be selective in the military operations in which we choose to participate. Where vital interests (i.e. survival) are at stake, the question of the use of military forces is clear-cut. But it is when we come to the cases where important, but not vital interests are threatened where the line becomes blurry "In such cases, military forces should only be used if they advance US interests, they are likely to be able to accomplish their objectives, the costs and risks of their employment are commensurate with the interests at stake, and other means have been tried and failed to achieve our objective."¹⁰ The strategy continues to state that we should also only use US military forces when the mission is clear and we have identified timelines and milestones that will indicate success or failure, and we have a clearly defined exit strategy Whenever possible, we should seek the assistance and involvement of our allies.

The drug war does not fit these criteria and therefore the military should not fight this war The interdiction effort has not been successful in removing the drugs from the streets of America, the use of the military in an unsuccessful interdiction program is an unwise use of an instrument that is being asked to expand its missions with fewer resources. Finally, the military was used as an instrument of first resort -- not last resort. The armed forces was viewed as an easy fix to a complex problem, some would say the military was used as a political pawn in the drug war to give the appearance that political administrations were serious about the problem and were doing something concrete to fix it.

¹⁰ A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, February, 1995 12

Perhaps an even stronger argument against the use of the military is the lack of a clear mission objective and desired end state. According to Casper Weinberger "A clear military objective -- not just a vague injunction to stop the drug traffickers -- must be specified."¹¹ Stop the drug traffickers -- How? Stop them completely or by a certain percentage? Stop only those trafficking in cocaine or go after the marijuana traffickers? Should we only concentrate on the western hemisphere or should we go after the heroin trade from the Far East? Should we attempt to seal the US borders? When will the drug war be won? These questions do not have definitive answers and without answers, how is the military to design a force and a strategy to effectively and efficiently fight this war?

Clausewitz, in his treatise "On War" emphasizes the importance of identifying the enemy's center of gravity -- "the point against which all our energies should be directed"¹² What is the center of gravity in the drug war? "One of the prime reasons why it is so difficult to find the center of gravity is that to a great extent the enemy is a market of hundreds of thousands of peasant producers, processors, runners, traffickers, and managers who are responding to the high profits of a large market in North America and Europe"¹³ Compounding the problem is the flexibility that drug traffickers appear to have. Close down one route into the United States and another route is found, destroy drug processing plants and others are built; seize trafficker aircraft or boats and others are bought; interdict one shipment of cocaine and ten others get through. Arrest three drug "mules" and more are hired. Without a clear mission objective, without a center of gravity against which to concentrate its forces, without a definable successful end state the

¹ Kenneth Sharpe, "The Military, the Drug War and Democracy in Latin America. What Would Clausewitz Tell Us?" *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol 4, #3 Winter 1993 60

² Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1976) 703

³ Sharpe 81

military is the wrong instrument of power to use in the fight against drugs. Concentrating on the supply side of the problem has failed. The U.S. needs a new strategy.

HOW TO WIN A "WAR" WITHOUT THE MILITARY

The drug war has two sides, the supply side against which the interdiction strategy has been focused, and the demand side. It is clear that Americans have a desire to buy and use drugs. As long as Americans have the money and desire for drugs, the suppliers will find a way to move drugs into the United States. Throughout the 1980's and early 1990's the national drug strategy focus has been on the supply side. "70 percent of the 1991 federal anti-drug dollars are invested in supply reduction programs; only 30 percent target demand."¹⁴ It is time to reverse this ratio. We need to accept the fact that drug abuse is a domestic problem and we need to marshal all our forces to attack this problem much as we are attacking the deficit or unemployment or inflation.

"Almost all experts now agree that the best hope for success is to turn from interdiction to prevention and treatment."¹⁵ In looking at the demand side of the drug war, there are several options that are worth serious consideration. No one option will solve the problem. However, used in combination these options have a chance of success.

The first option is education. America's youth must be convinced of the destructive potential of illegal drugs. The United States has made great strides in reducing the use of tobacco and alcohol. This was done through extensive education in our

¹⁴ Sharpe 63

¹⁵ "Fighting the Right Drug War," editorial, U.S. News and World Report, 26 April 1992

schools, and by media campaigns aimed at America's young people. The same approach should be used for illegal drugs.

A second option is treatment and rehabilitation. Treatment programs should be available in our prisons to try to break the cycle of drug use amongst inmates before they are placed back on the streets. There should be treatment programs freely available in our communities and first-time users or low-level offenders should be placed into these treatment programs rather than in jail.

We need to rebuild our inner cities and provide jobs for inner city youth. This option could help to remove some of the social ills that encourage young people to experiment with drugs and become low level pushers. "Federal drug policy must also confront the fact that many drug dealers and users will not 'just say no to drugs' unless they have something better to say 'yes' to, such as decent jobs, decent schools, and a chance for a decent life."¹⁶

We need to be looking to the sociologists, the mental health professionals and the medical community to work with our elected leaders and citizens to develop and fund innovative programs. If drug use in America is truly a national security threat, we must to take that threat seriously -- lip service will not solve the problem.

There is however, still a need to look at the supply side of the problem. But a different tact is needed. The US needs to be in the lead of an international effort to combat drug production. Drugs have become a global problem. They disrupt national economies and threaten democracies. International economic and diplomatic leverage needs to be coordinated and brought to bear against drug producing and transshipment

¹⁶ Sharpe 83

countries The drug trade should be considered along with other transnational problems such as weapons of mass destruction, environmental issues and migration problems

Although a center of gravity in the drug trade is difficult to identify, there is one aspect of drug trafficking that may be vulnerable to attack -- the money Individuals and governments are involved in drug trade because it is profitable. Attack the profits and you hurt the traffickers. An attack against the money will require a coordinated international effort as drug money is laundered and invested worldwide. Intelligence organizations, working with the DEA and other law enforcement agencies, should be at the forefront of this effort

CONCLUSION.

Military success in the drug war has been limited. It is not for lack of effort or resources that it has not worked. It is that the inherent nature of the drug problem does not lend itself to a simple, straight forward use of force solution. Lack of clear goals, restrictions on the use of the military such as posse comitatus, lack of a defined end state, no identifiable measures of success, and a mis-identification of the root of the problem doomed the interdiction effort to failure from the beginning. In a world today in which the military is being asked to bear more and more of the burdens of solving traditional and non-traditional problems, with less and less resources it should concentrate its efforts in areas where it can make a difference - and "just say no" to the drug war.